

Outdoor Recreation Issues

In this section, the issues affecting the provision of outdoor recreation are addressed. Identification of the issues most pertinent to Indiana's outdoor recreation spectrum is a requirement for participation in the Land and Water Conservation Fund program. These issues are developed using several methods. Some issues are included because they are federal requirements that must be addressed in order for Indiana to be eligible to receive monies from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Federally required issues include access to recreation and accessibility, wetlands, and trails. The trails issue must also be addressed to fulfill requirements of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). This allows Indiana to administer the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) that supports trail acquisition and development. Other issues include economic impacts, environmental education and public outreach, environmental impacts, and funding.

The Plan Advisory Committee (PAC), which oversees the development of the SCORP, guided the identification of the recreation issues. The PAC is made up of individuals who are knowledgeable in the field of outdoor recreation. This group includes academic professors, planners, local parks and recreation officials, consultants, and Department of Natural Resources staff. These people are surveyed at the beginning of the five-year planning cycle to determine the top issues that pertain to outdoor recreation in Indiana. This group then held a series of informational meetings regarding each topic. The issues were discussed and the Committee made recommendations on how to address these issues.



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The Issues Survey

In preparation for the 2000 SCORP, one of the first things addressed was an assessment of the issues associated with outdoor recreation. The 1997 Recreation Issues Survey began with a review of the 1993 issues survey developed in the previous planning cycle. Issue statements were derived from recent SCORPs from Indiana and surrounding states. The survey instrument was reviewed by the Plan Advisory Committee and Department of Natural Resources staff. The survey was sent to a random sampling of Indiana's residents, environmental groups and state and local agency personnel. A copy of the survey instrument is included in the Appendix. Final analysis of the data was conducted on completed surveys from the random sampling of Indiana residents. The effective response rate for all surveys was 32.5%.

The top five ranked issue statements relate to funding, protection, acquisition, partnerships and information. The highest ranked issue is directed at developing a stable, on-going funding source for outdoor recreation at all levels in the state. This concern moved up from the 1993 survey where it was ranked as number ten. The number two concern, protecting river resources, was ranked number six in the 1993 survey, illustrating the ongoing desire to protect and preserve Indiana's waterways.

Developing recreation opportunities close to home continues to be important, especially to those whose home is in an urban environment. Many organizations have recognized that these growing demands require new relationships with many different groups and organizations. Hence the identification of new or additional partnerships as a significant concern is consistent with current and expected challenges facing outdoor recreation professionals.

One of the challenges for decision and policy makers and planners alike is developing priorities and justifying providing recreational opportunities. Information about the economic impacts of various activities is crucial in these deliberations and rank high on the list of priority issues.

Top ranked issue statements from 1994-1999 SCORP

	Mean Score
Certain sections of recreation areas should be designated as quiet areas where activities like motorized recreation or loud music are prohibited.	1.53
There should be a balance between recreational use and preservation of natural resources.	1.62
Upgrading, renovating and improving outdoor recreation facilities should be done on a regular basis.	1.73
Environmental education should be used as a tool to build a greater awareness of the proper use and management of the environment.	1.75
Cooperation and planning should be improved between local, state, and federal agencies to develop and maintain outdoor recreation opportunities.	1.78

2000-2004 Recreation Issues Ranking

<u>Issue</u> Rated on a scale of 1 (most important) to 5 (least important)	<u>Mean Score</u>
A source of long term, consistent funding for outdoor recreation should be provided at the state and local level.	1.04
The state's current river recreation areas need to be protected.	1.11
Priority should be given to acquiring lands in urban areas for outdoor recreation.	1.16
New or additional partnerships should be developed between the private sector and local, state and federal agencies to develop and maintain outdoor recreation opportunities.	1.20
Economic impact data needs to be used in outdoor recreation planning.	1.22
The state should respect property rights even when they are in direct conflict with community recreation needs.	1.39
Environmental education is being well used as a tool to build a greater awareness of the proper use and management of the environment.	1.54
A source of long term, consistent funding for resource conservation should be provided at the state and local level.	1.90
The State of Indiana should make efforts to acquire land for recreation from individuals willing to sell land.	2.00
Having recreation areas close to my home improves my quality of life.	2.00
Legislation should be enacted to limit the personal liability at state owned and local private properties where recreation is provided.	2.10
User fees, special taxes, or licenses should be used as alternative sources of funding for outdoor recreation areas to help defer operational cost.	2.10
The number of visitors to recreation areas that are overused and over-crowded should be limited to aid in conservation.	2.30
The state should encourage a rails to trails program that acquires abandoned railroad rights-of-way and turns them into trails.	2.30
The state should provide support and assistance to local organizations in expanding local trail systems.	2.40
An information clearinghouse should be created to inform the public and recreation agencies about outdoor recreation opportunities in various regions of the state.	2.40
River based recreation opportunities need to be expanded.	2.50
I would like more recreation areas close to my home.	2.50
The state government should arrange a property tax replacement agreement with local government agencies for state recreation lands inside the local government's jurisdiction.	3.00
Where there is need, converting land from agriculture to recreational use is acceptable.	3.00
Motorized vehicles should have more public recreation space than is currently available to them.	4.00



Access to Recreation

Access to recreation means different things to different people. For the elderly and people with disabilities, it means being able to directly access or use the facilities or activities they choose. For those who are minorities, it means being able to use facilities when they choose without fear, intimidation or discrimination. For those who are economically disadvantaged, it means being able to afford to use the facilities or have access to transportation to recreation locations. It is the job of recreation providers to provide quality recreation experiences for ALL citizens and to make sure they can participate safely and to the fullest extent. Providing access to recreation for all people while maintaining the quality of experience and protecting the environment is a challenge, but it is one we must accept and conquer.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed to ensure equal access to public facilities regardless of ability. Recreation activities are no exception to this law. Expectations of a recreational experience are not different based on the abilities of the visitor. They are based on the experience a given facility is expected to provide. For example, people who visit state parks have different expectations than those who visit a baseball complex. Their expectations are based on the experience they desire, not the type of facility they visit. **The quality of experience should be the same for all people.** As our population changes, this will become increasingly important as the highly active and outdoors-conscious baby boom generation ages. People will continue to demand quality outdoor recreation experiences that will soon have to accommodate aging populations. The more developed and urban a site is, the more access people will expect.

Providing more information about recreational experiences at recreation sites is key in addressing some aspects of access to recreation. This applies to all citizens, not just those of a particular group or disability. It also applies to programming, issues, information and virtually every opportunity offered. If people have the information they need about a particular recreation activity and the power to make informed decisions about whether or not to participate in a particular activity, some of the conflicts surrounding access to recreation can be minimized.

Indiana has adopted the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) as its standard for developing facilities that are accessible. These guidelines cover both private and public sectors facilities under the ADA and the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA). The guidelines cover new construction and alterations and generally do not address existing facilities outside of planned alterations. The U.S. Access Board, which oversees the development and implementation of the guidelines has enacted a proposal to update these guidelines. The proposal seeks to improve access requirements while reconciling differences between ADAAG and national consensus standards, including model codes and industry standards. The board develops and maintains guidelines for the built environment that serve as the basis for standards issued by the other Federal agencies. ADAAG covers places of public accommodation, commercial facilities, and state and local government facilities. The board's intent is to specify a more uniform level of access. The guidelines provide scoping requirements, which indicate what has to be accessible, and technical provisions that specify how access is achieved. These guidelines are currently under review and are expected to be finalized in the spring of 2000.

UNIVERSAL TRAIL ASSESSMENT, THE IDNR EXPERIENCE

In 1998, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources made the decision to pilot a program in Universal Trail Assessment. The aim was to provide trail access to people of all abilities without sacrificing the natural integrity and experiential opportunity of the environment. IDNR acknowledged that trail users have a wide range of functional abilities and needs, depending on the individual's mobility and the trail conditions. Accessibility can only be defined with respect to the specific functional abilities and needs of each individual. For example, a trail that is easy for an experienced hiker may be moderately difficult for a family with a child in a stroller and impossible for someone with limited upper body strength who uses a manual wheelchair.

The process was developed by Beneficial Designs, Inc., who IDNR contracted with to get the pilot project started. It identifies five key elements for providing trail access information: grade, cross slope, trail width, surface type, and obstacles. It is designed to provide objective and reliable information about these key elements. Objective information about trail conditions enables users to determine the level of access or challenge relative to their own abilities. Safety on the trail is also increased by allowing the user to plan for any equipment or assistance which may be required to successfully and safely reach the destination. Trail access symbols convey the information to trail users through pocket maps, trailhead signage and other trail guide products.

Trails were assessed using simple surveying tools to measure the key elements at regular intervals along the trail. The bearing of the trail, determined with a hand-held compass, is used to generate accurate trail maps. Notes about the magnitude of obstacles, locations of points of interest, and areas needing maintenance work are also recorded. This information is conveyed to the users through access symbols created by Beneficial Designs, which have been released nationwide to parks for use on signs, maps and visitor kiosks. The symbols show standardized information on trail features such as grade, cross slope, width, surface type, facilities, and obstacles.

Brown County State Park and McCormick's Creek State Park were the first facilities to be assessed. Assessment at other state sites is ongoing and improvements and signage are being implemented as budget and staff time permits.



THE PRINCIPLES OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN

UNIVERSAL DESIGN: The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

PRINCIPLE ONE: Equitable Use

The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

Guidelines:

- 1a.** Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible, equivalent when not.
- 1b.** Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users.
- 1c.** Make provisions for privacy, security, and safety equally available to all users.
- 1d.** Make the design appealing to all users.

PRINCIPLE TWO: Flexibility in Use

The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

Guidelines:

- 2a.** Provide choice in methods of use.
- 2b.** Accommodate right or left-handed access and use.
- 2c.** Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision.
- 2d.** Provide adaptability to the user's pace.

PRINCIPLE THREE: Simple and Intuitive Use

Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

Guidelines:

- 3a.** Eliminate unnecessary complexity.
- 3b.** Be consistent with user expectations and intuition.
- 3c.** Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills.
- 3d.** Arrange information consistent with its importance.
- 3e.** Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: Perceptible Information

The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

Guidelines:

- 4a.** Use different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for redundant presentation of essential information.
- 4b.** Maximize “legibility” of essential information.
- 4c.** Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e., make it easy to give instructions or directions).
- 4d.** Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: Tolerance for Error

The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

Guidelines:

- 5a.** Arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors: most used elements, most accessible; hazardous elements eliminated, isolated, or shielded.
- 5b.** Provide warnings of hazards and errors.
- 5c.** Provide fail-safe features.
- 5d.** Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance.

PRINCIPLE SIX: Low Physical Effort

The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

Guidelines:

- 6a.** Allow user to maintain a neutral body position.
- 6b.** Use reasonable operating forces.
- 6c.** Minimize repetitive actions.
- 6d.** Minimize sustained physical effort.

PRINCIPLE SEVEN: Size and Space for Approach and Use

Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user’s body size.

Guidelines:

- 7a.** Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user.
- 7b.** Make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user.
- 7c.** Accommodate variations in hand and grip size.
- 7d.** Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.



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Access to Recreation - African Americans

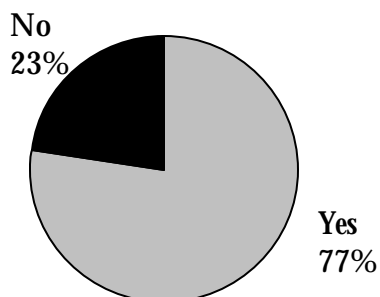
In order to expand our knowledge about the outdoor recreation participation habits of minority Indiana residents, the Division of Outdoor Recreation conducted the participation survey at the 1999 Indiana Black Expo to collect information about the recreation habits of African Americans. Essentially the survey focused on the participation habits of urban African Americans in Marion county. This is mainly due to the large concentration of minorities in Marion county, and therefore, they make up the bulk of the attendance at Indiana Black Expo. For that reason, it is not statistically valid if applied to the entire state. The survey does provide some insight into the largest minority community in Indiana.

The respondents to the Indiana Black Expo survey prefer walking for pleasure, casual bike riding, wildlife viewing and relaxing in the out-of-doors as their top three activities. Basketball was the number one active sport with baseball and softball next often selected. Those who go camping prefer tent camping.

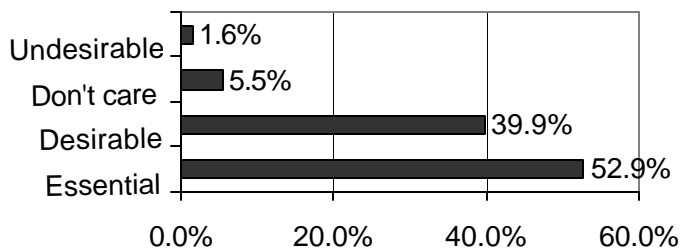
When the respondents recreate near water, the watercraft most often selected was a personal watercraft and they prefer swimming pools to beaches. Very few people said that they hunted and when they go fishing they fish along the banks of ponds or lakes.

The respondents at Black Expo were more likely to use public recreation facilities and less likely to use private properties or their own personal property. They are equally willing to drive up to an hour to participate in outdoor recreation activities and slightly more willing to drive longer distances. Even though this group is willing to travel longer distances, time is still of essence to this group of individuals as they overwhelmingly identified lack of time as the reason they did not participate in outdoor recreation activities more often.

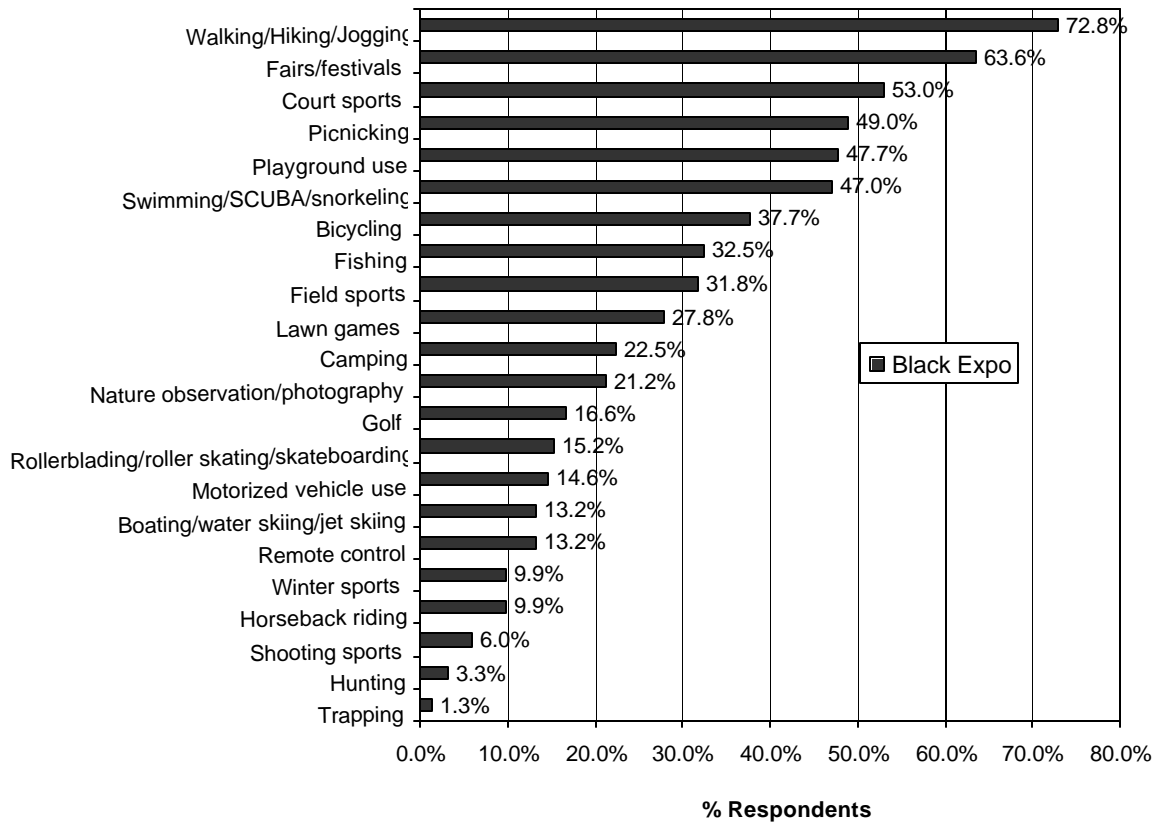
Did you participate in ANY outdoor recreation activity during the past year?



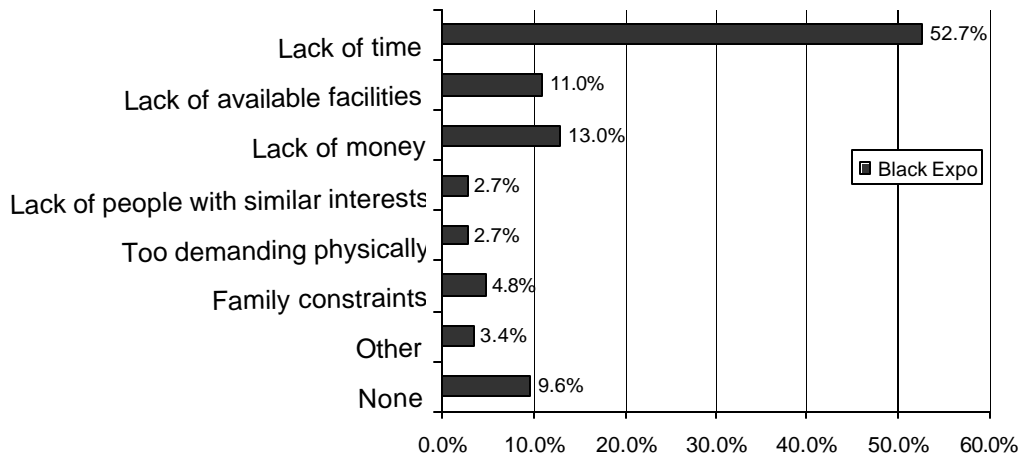
How important is outdoor recreation to you?



What outdoor recreation activity do you participate in regularly? (Multiple responses allowed)



What would be the main reason why you would not participate in outdoor recreation more often?





Access to Recreation - Hispanic Americans

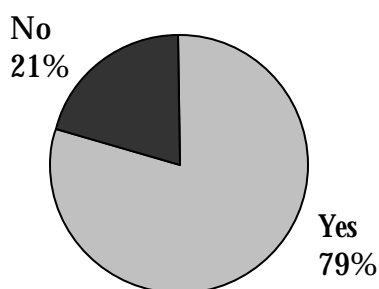
Indiana's Hispanic minority population is experiencing rapid growth. More rapidly than any other segment of Indiana's population. With this increase comes the need to evaluate how this minority population spends its leisure time. This knowledge will help to make sure that the needs of all are being met. Indiana's Hispanic citizens make up roughly 2.5 percent of our population base (1998 census estimates). This number is expected to nearly double by the time the 2000 census is conducted. Research indicates these people tend to recreate in large family groups, but that is about the extent of the information available about Hispanic Hoosiers. To add insight into the recreation participation habits of the Hispanic community in Indiana, the self-identified Hispanic respondents to the 1998 participation survey were selected out and analyzed to see if there were any differences in what they choose to do for recreation.

Walking, attending fairs and festivals, and fishing were the top three activities selected by these respondents. Basketball was the most popular active recreation activity, while the most popular passive recreation activities were picnicking and walking. Very few of the Hispanic respondents indicated they played field sports, while nearly 27 percent indicated they rode their bikes casually during the past year.

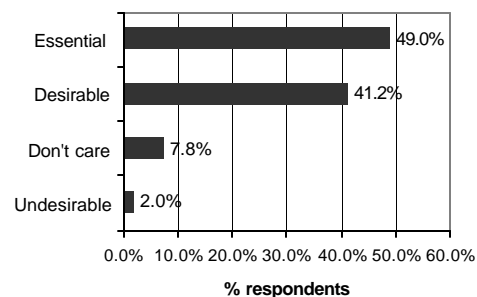
This group of people uses tents or cabins when they go camping. When it comes to water recreation, this group uses beaches and pools equally. When they go boating they prefer powerboating and waterskiing. Bank fishing and lake fishing were more often selected than hunting. Those that do hunt say they hunt deer and small game.

The Hispanic survey population indicated they use state facilities to recreate on, with private facilities being the next often selected. They were least likely to use federal or membership-only facilities. People said they recreated with friends or children most often. Like the rest of the population, this group indicated that lack of time was the reason they do not participate as often as they would like to.

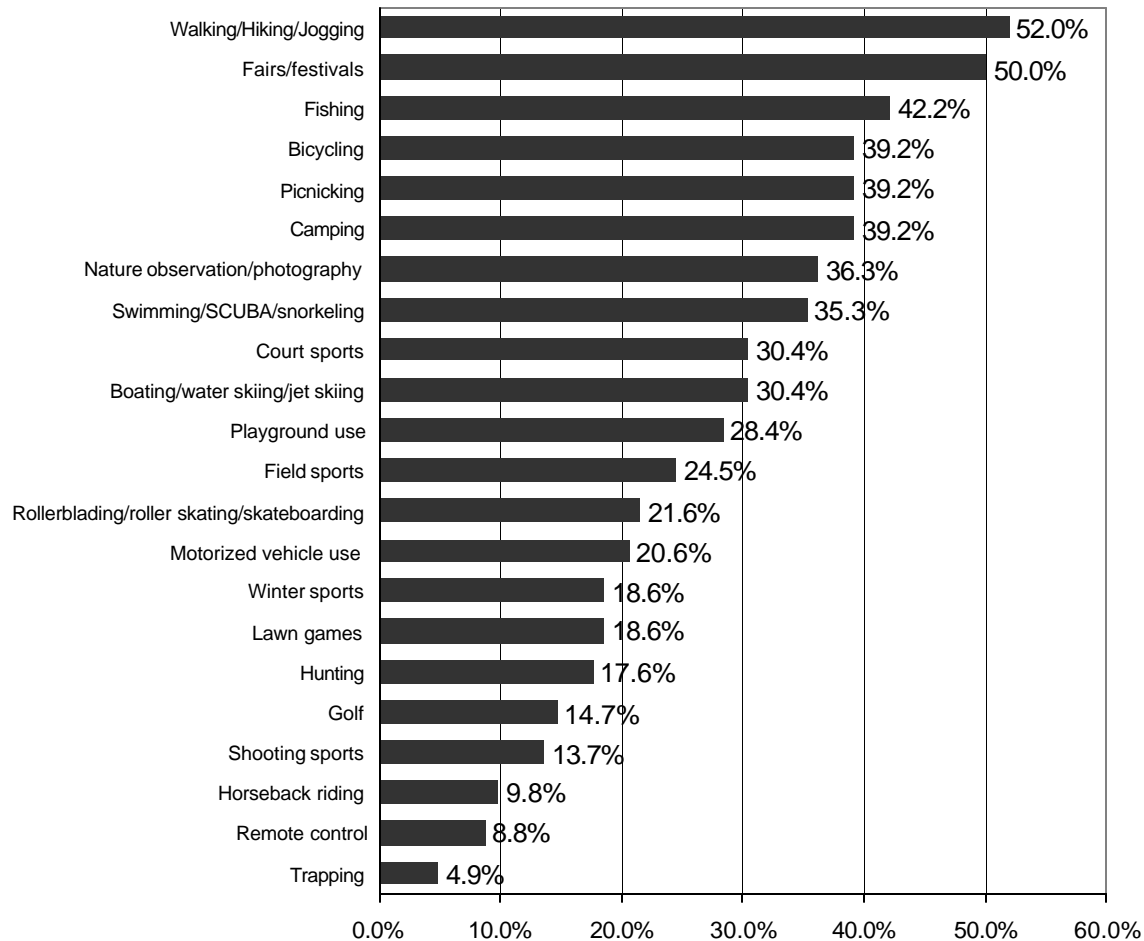
Did you participate in ANY outdoor recreation activity during the past year? (Hispanic respondents)



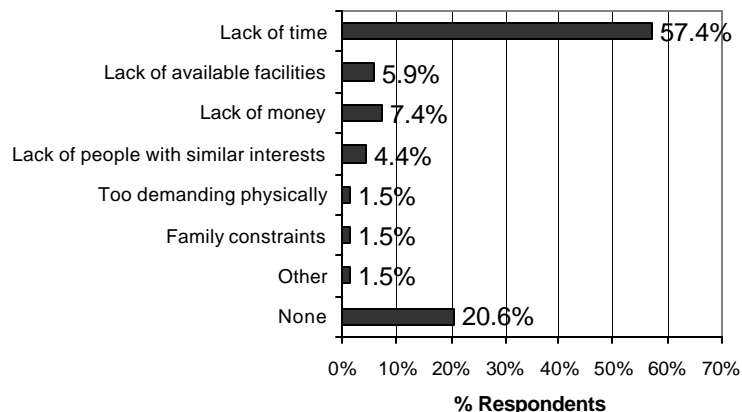
How important is outdoor recreation to you? (Hispanic respondents)



What outdoor recreation activity do you participate in regularly? (Multiple responses allowed) (Hispanic Respondents)



What would be the main reason why you would not participate in outdoor recreation more often? (Hispanic Respondents)





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Economic Impacts

It is well documented and agreed upon that outdoor recreation is critically important to the physical, social, and psychological well being of individuals. However, one of the areas where there is considerably less information available and less widespread agreement is in regards to the economic impacts of outdoor recreation. While economic impacts are difficult to measure, more and more communities are realizing that protecting natural resources and providing recreation opportunities contributes to the quality of life in an area and can be good for the bottom line.

Decision makers and recreation providers are increasingly being forced to justify outdoor recreation projects on economic grounds. As populations grow and demand for outdoor recreation increases, continued emphasis will be placed on the economic rationale. Do the benefits outweigh the costs?

Across the nation, parks and protected open spaces are increasingly recognized as vital to the quality of life that fuels economic health. In fact, outdoor recreation areas help support a \$502 billion tourism industry. In November 1998, voters approved 72% of the 240 state and local ballot measures concerning land conservation, parks, and smarter growth. This is a sign that people are beginning to understand that conservation, open space protection, and outdoor recreation are investments, not costs.

The economic impacts of outdoor recreation and open space protection can be significant. Impacts range from localized economic benefits to reductions in municipal infrastructure costs to lowered health care costs and even to reductions in enforcement costs by targeting “at-risk” youth. Attracting new business can capture large-scale economic benefits. According to a 1997 study conducted on the role of parks and recreation in business relocation decisions, owners of small companies ranked recreation/parks/open space as the highest priority in choosing a new location for their business. This results in real, added value to the community, whether it is in the form of a new bicycle store, new industry, or revenue generated from outdoor recreation activities and associated sales.

Parks and recreation activities are assets to the growing tourism industry and their value should not be underestimated. As travel and tourism grows in Indiana and across the country, communities are coming to see their parks and recreation opportunities in a new light. Recognizing and benefiting from the connection between outdoor recreation and tourism will continue to be an important vehicle for economic development.

Sophisticated economic evaluations have been conducted to assess the benefits and costs of trails, greenways, and recreation projects. The Indiana Department of Natural Resources contracted Indiana University’s Center for Urban Policy and the Environment to conduct several economic studies of trails and greenways in order to expand the body of economic impact information and literature specific to our state. The results of this work generally supported recreational development and planning, and highlighted the economic potential of outdoor recreation

(refer to the Appendix for abstracts of the greenways studies). As methods and economic analyses improve and become more readily available, evidence shows that many outdoor recreation projects can be justified on their recreational values alone. Many others have the potential to add significantly to local or regional economies. So, whether a benefit is direct or indirect, tangible or intangible, outdoor recreation can have positive economic impacts and economic arguments should be used for support.

Advocates, professionals, and policy makers should be aware of the economic potential of outdoor recreation and need to recognize the power and importance of economic evidence.



Environmental Education and Public Outreach

A very important, but often overlooked aspect of outdoor recreation is the opportunity for education inherently associated with experiencing the environment. There also is a certain amount of knowledge that is necessary in order for the public to use the environment appropriately. Educating children about the environment is critical to protecting and preserving the natural and recreational resources in Indiana for the next generation. Likewise, an environmentally educated public is vital to maintaining and enhancing recreational opportunity and supply.

In 1996, a survey conducted by the Indiana Conservation Education Working group indicated that less than 30% of the elementary educators in Indiana integrated environmental education into their teaching activities. Lack of time during the school day and lack of funds are indicated as the main reasons that teachers do not use environmental education. However, the single greatest factor contributing to the relative lack of environmental education taught in our schools is the alarming number of educators who believe that environmental education is not relevant to what they teach. This suggests a tremendous opportunity to “educate” the educator. Teachers teach what they have been taught.

Study after study has indicated that people who regularly recreate in the out-of-doors are healthier and tend to live longer, more productive lives than those who do not spend time outdoors. They also tend to be better educated than their indoor counterparts and are more likely to be able to handle the stresses of our fast-paced society. Many people who spend time outdoors regularly learned their behaviors as children or young adults; the ages when people are developing the habits that carry them throughout their lifetime. Many people can trace this participation directly back to the influence of an individual who sparked their interest in the out-of-doors through recreational activity or by showing them some intriguing aspect of the natural world. In many cases, this was a teacher in a school setting. If developing the ethics and skills that will carry one through one's life is not relevant to a child's education, then it is a bleak future indeed.

Teachers have a profound influence on the development and attitudes of their students. It is absolutely critical for educators to introduce their students to environmental issues and ethics, especially at an early age. Indiana has many fine environmental and conservation educators, many of whom are nationally recognized. Unfortunately, these shining examples can only reach so many. There is a great and pressing need for more people who can effectively educate children and the public in general about the environment. The lessons to be learned about the protection, conservation and use of natural resources in Indiana will benefit all Hoosiers for generations to come.

Children who participate in activities out-of-doors and carry these habits through their adult lives tend to grow up to be happier and healthier adults. Indiana has, during the last ten years, consistently ranked among the least fit peoples in the United States. As a state, our population weighs more, eats more and exercises less than the populations of nearly every other state in the union. If this trend is to reverse itself, then we must begin with our children. Healthy, environmentally conscious children grow up to become healthy, environmentally aware adults. Getting kids away from the computer and the TV and into the out-of-doors is a good place to start.

Public outreach is another facet of environmental education to be addressed in order to further an awareness of the environment and outdoor recreation in Indiana. Of particular concern, recently, is what is termed Indiana's "brain drain". The scientists and technology innovators that are trained in Indiana are taking their skills and talents out-of-state and practicing them elsewhere. Outdoor recreation opportunities are not the only way to attract and keep people, but it is a major consideration for industry and business when relocating. Communities with strong recreation delivery systems tend to be more viable than communities without these resources. Marketing and informing the public of outdoor recreation opportunities available in a community can promote the image of a healthy, skilled workforce. Ample recreation opportunities, both indoors and out, can be a major attraction when deciding where to settle and raise a family.

When a community or other governmental organization invests the resources to develop quality outdoor recreation opportunities, there are recreational user ethics that must be fostered among the public to maintain services and reduce the conflict that can occur between users and user groups. Community pride and facility design go a long way to mitigate these conflicts, but instilling an outdoor ethic on the part of the user can further enhance the opportunities and experiences that exist. Knowledgeable and ethically aware citizens are the building blocks upon which sound outdoor recreation delivery systems are built. They become the driving force behind the maintenance, conservation and protection of the natural and recreational resources that are available in our communities.

Interacting with the environment while having minimal impact on its quality and on the experiences of other users may be the single most important component to any recreational activity. Including such ethics awareness when developing and expanding recreational services and programs will further enhance the opportunities that are available. It will also increase the user's ability to participate in the maintenance and development of opportunities. Users are more likely to volunteer to assist in maintaining activities when they have a feeling of ownership. A sense of ownership and pride can be generated through ethics awareness campaigns. Recreation opportunities and services are more likely to succeed when the users develop this sense of ownership. Users will be less tolerant of unethical or destructive behaviors and will be more likely to take steps to prevent it. Providing interpretive facilities and programming at the local level can be a key factor in developing ethics awareness.

Environmental education and public outreach are crucial to developing and maintaining quality outdoor recreation facilities, services, and programs. If the public is to participate in the use, conservation and protection of our natural resources, it must acquire a certain level of knowledge about these natural resources. It is the job of natural resource professionals and recreation providers alike to provide opportunities for the public to gain this knowledge. We must take action. If Indiana is to continue the fine tradition of providing quality outdoor recreation experiences for the generations to come, then educating both the adult public and the children is imperative.



Environmental Impacts

Thousands of footsteps, miles of tire tread, and hundreds of hooves leave imprints daily on the Indiana landscape as people venture outside for recreation. The sounds of voices, motors, slamming doors, campfires, splashing waters, turning oars, and spinning spokes all add to the noise level in the environment. Most of these are pleasant images of environmental impacts that stem from outdoor recreation. While many of us enjoy outdoor recreation, we often do not consider the environmental impacts that threaten outdoor recreation or the way outdoor recreation itself impacts the environment.

There are many external threats to the protection of our natural resources and the provision of outdoor recreation opportunities. Increasing development pressures, pollution, contaminants, erosion, and a rapidly growing population are just a few of the many threats. These threats can have serious impacts on environmental quality, plant and animal communities, and in turn outdoor recreation.

Recreation activities can negatively affect natural resources, including land, water, and wildlife. The impacts of individual recreational activities range from visual/aesthetic intrusions to serious resource degradation, including damage to vegetation, soils, water quality, and even human health. For example, hiking, mountain biking, camping, and motorized off-road vehicle riding all have resource impacts, although at varying degrees. Obviously some recreational pursuits are more environmentally intrusive than others. Not all recreation impacts are negative, nor are they all positive.

Both recent trends and future projections point toward continued increases in the number of participants, trips, and activity days for outdoor recreation across the country. Coupled with a growing population and a finite resource base, there is no doubt that outdoor recreation pressures in Indiana will continue to increase and have environmental impacts, both beneficial and damaging.

As recreation managers and users, there are several fronts in which we can work to improve outdoor recreation and limit environmental impacts:

1. Educating users and the general public about responsible and appropriate recreation behavior and environmental concerns is paramount.
2. Designing recreation areas and facilities to accommodate expected volumes and patterns of use while keeping landscape and environmental concerns in mind is also important.
3. Developing and applying sound resource management practices will help to limit and/or restore damage.
4. Identifying opportunities for resource protection and funding will continue to be critical.

5. And developing creative and innovative management approaches can help to lessen the burden on the future of outdoor recreation.

Recreation providers need to make informed decisions that attempt to balance recreation interests with conservation/environmental concerns. Outdoor recreation professionals and users have a dual responsibility to enhance recreational experiences while practicing responsible resource stewardship. Continued efforts should be made to strike a balance between access and development and the protection of our natural resources. Keep in mind that outdoor recreation is but one use and one concern in the larger environmental picture, and make every effort to minimize any impacts.



Funding

Funding continues to be one of the universal challenges facing outdoor recreation and natural resource conservation agencies. As populations grow, demands increase for outdoor recreation facilities and programming. Operating funds are also a constant challenge for agencies committed to natural resource conservation and protection. Although vitally important, conservation dollars often fall short of conservation needs.

Many local park and recreation agencies are asked to do *more* with *less* when budgets do not keep pace with growing demand. This is a true source of frustration among park and recreation boards and those professionals who are often faced with unpleasant choices, such as delaying parkland acquisition, limiting park improvements, or reducing program offerings. It is also disappointing to the visitor, who has expectations that these vital services will be provided.

Successful agencies look beyond traditional funding sources and are finding creative ways to finance crucial conservation and recreation projects. Unfortunately, some organizations feel they lack the skills to raise significant amounts of money on their own. Others feel overwhelmed at the thought of coordinating a major capital campaign for land acquisition or large-scale development project.

Money is just one of many tools used in protecting the environment, acquiring parkland, and providing outdoor recreation resources. This work is too important to simply lament, "If only there were more money..." If money is not readily available for an important project, recreation providers have to be creative and work to uncover additional funding sources.

Fortunately there is help available. Increasingly, community-based initiatives and not-for-profit organizations are focusing on the value of park and outdoor recreation resources and the need to protect the environment. The power of local groups, combined with existing State and Federal programs provides creative alternatives for all involved in conservation and outdoor recreation.

To begin, solicit public input and develop a master plan for a project, as well as, a plan for recreation for the entire community. With a plan or drawing in hand, it is possible to share the dream with others. Groups other than governmental agencies might be in a position to help make the dream a reality, by volunteering, providing assistance, or making a direct donation. With a developed plan, investment costs come into focus, and funding sources can be identified. One of the best ways to learn about the recreation funding process is to talk with other agencies that have undertaken similar projects and who have had success.

Other possible funding sources include community foundations, local businesses, service clubs, local sororities and fraternal organizations, neighborhood associations, individuals, and bequests from estates. Many communities have also established nonprofit park foundations to provide additional financial support. These groups are sometimes eligible for alternative sources of

funding. Another advantage is that some individuals are more willing to donate to a nonprofit organization than directly to a governmental agency.

Partnership projects can be very effective by bringing together the creative and financial resources of two or more organizations. Park and recreation agencies often work with school corporations, neighboring jurisdictions, local historical societies, and other local groups on projects that benefit all concerned. User fees, individual donations, fines, sponsorships, impact fees, and taxes can also contribute in many instances, and these funds can be leveraged through some grant programs.

Donations “in-kind” are also a great way to reduce costs. For instance, local building, electrical, or plumbing contractors can be approached to donate their time, materials, and equipment in helping with park projects. Instead of directly donating money toward a project, perhaps a local paving contractor would donate the paving work for a small parking lot at a new public park. In most instances, the value of these contributions is tax-deductible for the donor. There is also future value in bringing people together for the common good of the community, and in fostering this sense of “ownership” in the project.

Bond issues allow projects to be completed earlier than would otherwise be possible. Many agencies are able to leverage a repayment commitment (over a fixed period of time) so funds can be used “up front” for land acquisition or large-scale developments. Through the sale of bonds, agencies are empowered to commit to these projects, and retire the debt over several years.

Many local agencies are also stretching limited funds by making increased use of volunteers. Members of service clubs, community-service workers, retirees, school and church groups, local scouting organizations, environmental groups, university interns, and prison work crews can be used to help develop, improve, and maintain outdoor recreation facilities.

Information about creative funding and volunteer recruitment is available from park and recreation professionals throughout the state, and from other governmental and not-for-profit agencies. Most agencies are willing to share this information to help others learn effective techniques for maximizing financial resources. Keep in mind, they learned from others before them. The bottom line is that investing in public recreation resources is similar to any other important purchase—if we truly want something, we will find a way to pay for it!

Refer to the *DNR Resource Manual* for information on grant resources and funding opportunities available from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.



Trails

Trails are increasingly recognized as vital to recreation systems. They link recreation facilities and communities and offer excellent economic development potential. However, trails are a controversial topic across the country, and Indiana is a reflection of these issues.

The level of acceptance of trails has improved in recent years, but some trail development continues to be an issue. Trails have a number of educational and political roadblocks. Concern over trails includes economic, safety, and management considerations. Involving and listening to landowners and community members has perhaps the most potential in dealing with these issues.

The Trails Advisory Board identified five main trail issues across Indiana, which covered the following topics: availability of trail opportunities, establishment of industry standards, availability of trail information, development of trail networks and alternative uses, and long-term planning. Although many of these issues are broad and apply to the entire state, each community has its own set of issues and roadblocks that need to be addressed in order to improve public trail opportunities. Work with the opposition- do not avoid them. Community buy-in and interest can go a long way in convincing others that trails are worthwhile. Refer to Indiana's Trails Plan located in the Appendix for additional trail information, including general information, survey results, and goals and objectives.

In Indiana, less than four percent of the entire state is in public ownership. This severely limits the ability to expand public trail opportunities. An overwhelming percentage of people surveyed in the 1998 Statewide Participation Survey indicated that walking, hiking, jogging, bicycling, and horseback riding are activities that they would like to participate in more if adequate facilities were available. These linear recreation activities translate into trail use. Acquisition of more land and waterways must be actively pursued in order to meet the growing demand for trail based recreation, including sufficient buffer zones and development of support facilities. Acquisition of land for linking greenway corridors to create a larger system should also be pursued. Where acquisition is not possible, other options for establishing trail opportunities like lease agreements, easements, and joint agreements with utility companies should be pursued.

Trail design, construction, and maintenance standards should be created cooperatively between the lead planning agency and the community. Public needs and concerns and environmental constraints must be addressed in developing these standards. Standards should provide for the protection and enhancement of natural and cultural resources. Existing state, local, and federal regulations must be included in standards for trail development. Trail standards should address preservation of sensitive natural areas, carrying capacity and trail use, facility design, accessibility, and risk management. Regular monitoring after trail development assures that trails continue to meet use demands, safety standards, and environmental standards.

Education is the key to self-regulated trail use. Information should be made available to all trail users and potential users on the importance of responsible use. Information on the causes of user group conflicts, trails serving as alternative modes of transportation, trail safety, and trail benefits should be included in trail public education programs. Comprehensive and easily obtainable trail information is an important part of any trail system. Information can be presented through brochures, videos, posters, outdoor signs, and live programs. Minimum information should include trail regulations, trail uses, safety precautions, maps of local area trails and access points, and trail layout maps. Additional information may include references to outdoor ethics, accessibility, natural resources, and local history and culture.

Trails need to be provided for a variety of uses, both motorized and nonmotorized, and on both land and water. More opportunities are needed for bicycling (road and mountain), hiking and walking, horseback riding, in-line skating, and snowmobiling. Public trail opportunities are also needed for all-terrain vehicles, off-road motorcycling, off-highway vehicles, and new uses that may arise in the future.

Multiple-use trails can be designed to accommodate many different user groups on the same trail. They can be developed in a variety of ways such as designing for different uses on the same treadway, establishing separate-use treadways within a trail corridor, or instituting time zones allowing for specific uses during certain times of the day or certain times of the year.

In addition to recreation, trails need to be established as alternative transportation routes: trails that connect housing, schools, businesses, retail centers, recreation areas, and other popular areas. Economic, environmental, health, and social benefits can all be realized through trail development.

Trail planning does not end after the trail has been created. Trail management and monitoring is an ongoing process and requires planning. Long-term management plans can be used to: address liability concerns; suggest actions when trail conditions and/or usage does not meet predetermined standards; ensure that proper maintenance will be conducted throughout the life of the trail; and define the roles of volunteers utilized in trail management.

Identifying the issues is just the beginning of improving the climate for trails in Indiana. Engaging the stakeholders and developing an action plan for addressing the various issues and interests is critical to improving trail opportunities. And while planning is important, strategic **action** is even more so. Trails are popular now and demand for additional quality trail opportunities is expected to grow.



Wetlands

In 1996 the Indiana Department of Natural Resources adopted the *Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan* as its guiding policy document regarding wetland resources and issues. This document was prepared for the IDNR with the help of the Wetlands Advisory Group and the Wetlands Technical Advisory Team. An executive summary of this document follows.

Wetlands, like soils, trees, fields, rivers, hills, and other natural resources, are vital components of the Indiana landscape. Wetlands serve important function, both in human benefits such as maintaining the quality of the water we drink and controlling flooding, and in environmental benefits such as providing habitat for endangered species of wildlife and plants. The fact that the majority of the wetland resources once present in Indiana have been lost or converted to other uses makes wetlands especially critical resources for conservation.

Although wetlands conservation has at times been a controversial topic, there is broad agreement among diverse interests on many aspects of wetlands conservation and public responsibility. The purpose of the *Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan*, and the long-term, intensive planning process used to develop it, is to achieve that conservation in ways that are beneficial to all Hoosiers. It establishes common ground on which progress in wetland conservation can be made, and it sets forth specific action designed to achieve that progress.

The *Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan* has been developed through an extensive process of information gathering, input, and review by a variety of interests across the state. Development of the *Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan* was guided by the Wetlands Advisory Group, (people representing diverse stakeholders in Indiana wetlands conservation – from environmentalists to county surveyors; from farmers to coal mine operators) and the Technical Advisory Team (technical representatives from the state and federal agencies that have regulatory or oversight roles in wetlands conservation).

The *Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan* includes a wetlands definition, goal, guiding principles, wetlands conservation priorities, and case studies of wetland conservation partnerships already up and running. The *Hoosier Wetland Conservation Initiative* is the heart and soul of the *Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan*. It provides a strategic approach to conserving Indiana's wetlands resources. The *Initiative* has six components:

1. The cornerstone of the *Initiative* is an emphasis on planning and implementing the plan through local wetland conservation partnerships called focus areas.
2. Obtaining increased scientific information on Indiana's wetland resources is critical to identifying and implementing long-term wetland conservation strategies and policies that are both effective and cost-efficient.
3. The *Initiative* emphasizes positive incentives that motivate people to voluntarily conserve and restore wetlands.
4. The *Initiative* calls for increased wetlands education for technical staff, people who own/work the land, school children, and other audiences.

5. The *Initiative* seeks the acquisition of permanent protection for the highest priority wetlands from willing owners.
6. Continued work of the Wetlands Advisory Group and Technical Advisory Team in implementing the Initiative is critical to conserving Indiana's wetland resources.

Development and implementation of the *Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan* is designed to achieve this goal:

Conserve Indiana's remaining wetland resources, as defined by acreage, type, and function, and restore and create wetlands where opportunities exist to increase the quality and quantity of wetland resources.

This goal embraces the following concepts:

- No-net-loss of wetlands. In other words, the necessity of impacting some wetlands is recognized, but the goal is to have no overall loss of wetland.
- Conservation of existing wetlands is important in terms of acreage, type, and function. Acreage refers to the quantity or amount of wetland. Type refers to the ecological community; for example, a bog or a marsh. Function refers to the roll of wetlands in the environment; for example, groundwater recharge, flood waters storage, or endangered species habitat.
- In most cases, restoring wetlands that have been drained or modified in some way is preferred to creating wetland where none existed previously. However, there are opportunities for creating wetlands for specific purposes such as wastewater treatment.
- Includes preservation as part of conservation. Some wetlands are sensitive, and to the degree possible, should be protected from all human disturbance – what some people refer to as preservation. However, the conservation of many wetlands is compatible with other uses such as timber harvesting or hunting.
- Explicitly acknowledges the importance of conserving the quality of wetlands as well as the quantity of wetlands.
- The short-term goal is to conserve the wetland resources that exist in Indiana today. The long-term goal is to increase Indiana's wetland resources.
- Is consistent with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources' December 1, 1995 non-rule policy on wetlands conservation (Appendix).

In Indiana, the wetlands plan is a dynamic document. The objectives are annually reviewed and updated. Additional, specific goals and objectives for wetlands can be found in the Appendix.

